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ABSTRACT

This paper (1) reports some of the findings of a national needs survey of campus based women's centers; (2) details some of the common characteristics of campus based women's centers; (3) identifies problematic internal organizational issues; and (4) relates those organizational issues to institutional constraints. In particular, it notes some of the ways in which the potentially advantageous cross-departmental position of such centers is impaired by these dual sources of pressure. What emerges is a picture of women's centers as organizations whose advantageous position is less able to be utilized because of patterns of problematic internal organizational response to their efforts. Findings suggest that the low budgets allocated to these centers, despite perceived support and recognition of the worth of programs, may be correlated with particular issues in dealing with administrators. Over half the centers responding cited differences in values and goals as related to poor working relationships with administrators. (Author)

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WOMEN'S CENTERS: ORGANIZATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS ON MEETING EDUCATIONAL NEEDS *

by

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Over the last several years, campus based women's centers have been organized as immediate and local responses to discriminatory and prejudicial educational policies and practices. Because of the range of problems this includes, they tend to be multi-faceted in their programming. A major way in which they seek to bring about educational equity is to provide direct services to supplant existing biased services or to meet needs where services are non-existent. Closely connected with this multi-faceted approach is the fact that unlike other campus agencies or departments, women's centers are in a position to be concerned with all aspects of the institution. This is a unique position in that they are not limited by single department concerns. Instead, women's centers have the potential to take the responsibility for advocacy and program creation wherever significant issues of equity arise. This cross-departmental perspective enables centers to address issues and problems around admissions, financial aid, housing, course content, promotion and tenure, personnel policies, health services etc.

While the existence and number of campus based women's centers nationally has been reported on in a Ford Foundation study conducted by Judy Bertelson[1] and in the publication "Women's Centers: Where Are They?"[2], until very recently no systematic national effort had been made to document the needs of these Centers and begin the task of relating the expressed needs and circumstances, the effective functioning of these Centers and the the task of meeting the educational needs of women at institutions of higher education in this country.

1. Bertelson, Judy "Two Studies of Women in Higher Education", Mills College, 1974

2. "Women's Centers:Where Are They?" published by Project on the Status and Education of Women, Washington D.C. 1975

The purpose of this paper is 1) to report some of the findings of a National Needs Survey of Campus Based Women's Centers, 2) to detail some of the common characteristics of campus based women's centers, 3) to identify problematic internal organizational issues, 4) to relate those organizational issues to institutional constraints and note some of the ways in which the potentially advantageous cross-departmental position of such Centers is impacted upon and their effectiveness in meeting educational needs impaired by these dual sources of pressure.

National Needs Survey

With the intent of both providing data for validation of a training program being created and to systematically collect information on the needs and characteristics of campus based women's centers, the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) Project of Everywoman's Center at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst conducted a National Needs Survey of Campus Based Women's Centers in the Fall of 1976. Question areas were developed using the findings of the Bertelson study[3], a content analysis of needs or problems cited in letters received by Everywoman's Center from other Centers and the work of other experts knowledgeable about the population[4].

A seven page survey instrument was developed by the Project. It was designed to elicit information from Centers on their needs in areas of program and budget development and negotiation and organizational processes as well as determine if they felt they did or did not have the resources to deal with those needs. Organizational issues and structure, administrative support, programs offered, consistent users, staff characteristics, funding

3. op cit

4. e.g. Margaret Talbertt, Director of Project WELD (Women's Education: Learning and Doing), a FIPSE funded study of 8 model special programs for women at various higher educational institutions.

level and type of institution were question areas to which the Centers were also asked to respond. The survey questionaire was then piloted, revised and mailed to the 386 campus based women's centers throughout the country.

These centers had been identified by using the most recent edition (1975) of "Women's Centers:Where Are They?"[5], the files of Everywoman's Center and supplementary information from individuals. This number was seen to be the known, national population of such centers at the time of the survey. Twenty -one (21) serveys returned (i.e. the center or in some cases the college had closed), eight centers which participated in the pilot and nine duplicate listings reduced the total number of potential participants to three hundred and forty eight (348) centers. The number of useable responses was 134 and the response rate for the survey in relation to this adjusted population figure was 38.5%.

While conducting the survey was one intent and outcome of the Everywoman's Center WEEA Project, the primary goal of the latter was the design, development and implementation of a training program for staffs of campus based women's centers. The main focus of the training was on program development and budget development and negotiation . During 1976-77, the Project directly trained staff from twenty-three (23) campus based women's centers. As part of the evaluation of those efforts, pre and post training interviews using both participant check lists and open-ended questions were conducted.

While the methodologies varied - one, a survey instrument mailed to a whole population and the other, face to face interviews of staff from the sample trained using checklists and questions - the more in-depth responses from Centers provided by the interviewing complements the descriptive statistical information which the National Needs Survey generated. There was congruency to

5. op cit

the content or question areas in both approaches. Together they provide a view of the circumstances and issues for women's centers which should better inform our understanding of the efforts and varying effectiveness experienced by women's centers on campuses throughout the country. It is from these two sources, the survey[6] and interviews, that data presented in subsequent portions of this paper was obtained.

Women's Centers : Some Characteristics

It would seem that an appreciation and understanding of the efforts, problems and constraints of campus based women's centers would best proceed from knowledge of the groups to which such centers try to appeal, those with whom they are successful (i.e. the consistent users) and some characteristics of centers which bear on the constraints and problems they experience.

One way of viewing who it is that women's centers can and do appeal to is to identify who they see themselves as willing to focus on and respond to the needs of and who the staff represents. Eighty-four (84%) percent of Centers responding replied affirmatively when asked about their willingness to respond to a wide variety of women's needs and issues. In light of such willingness it is then instructive to note the varied groups of women represented on staffs of women's centers and the knowledge of and familiarity with the needs of the groups thus represented. The following table reports the findings of the National Needs Survey in this regard. The data suggests that in addition to a self-identified willingness to address the needs of various women, these Centers have the advantage of being staffed by women who are part of groups represented in or seeking to become part of the campus population.

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6. Throughout the paper the Survey or National Needs Survey shall be used to refer to the National Needs Survey of Campus Based Women's Centers conducted by the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) Project of Everywoman's Center at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst

TABLE 1

Staff Representation n = 121	% Centers
Blacks/Afro-Americans	29.7
Spanish Surnamed/Spanish Speaking	22.3
Oriental Americans	5.7
Native Americans	17.3
Single Parents	60.3
Historically Poor	20.6
Lesbians	50.4
Older (Over 35)	69.4

The data indicates that women's centers do bridge gaps across various groups and also demonstrates that these groups of women can and do work together to meet the educational needs of other women. When this information is combined with the responses of Centers surveyed as to who their consistent users are, one begins to get a picture of women's centers as organizations that both see themselves and are seen by their users as in a position to be responsive to the educational needs of a wide variety of women. Of particular significance in the light of the cross-departmental perspective and situation previously mentioned.

TABLE 2

Consistent Users of Women'sCenters	% of Consistent Users
Undergraduates	86.5
Women from the Community	65.9
Graduate Students	42.8
Faculty	38.0
College/University Workers	34.9

Further consideration of the survey responses which identify common characteristics of women's centers in conjunction with the data on staff representation and consistent users will be instructive in helping us to understand the issues faced by Centers which impact on their ability to advantageously use the cross-departmental position and staff composition they have.

This position, a self-image as being willing to meet the needs of varied groups of women and a user image as a place one would take needs would incline one to see Centers as potentially very effective. However, characteristics of Centers such as length of time in existence, staffing patterns, programs offered, degree and type of aministrative support received and funding patterns are all considerations which can be seen as having a bearing on their ability to utilize that position and potential.

Over half of the Centers surveyed reported they had been in existence for three or more years, while only 8% had been in existence under a year. TABLE 3 displays the full findings regarding time in existence.

TABLE 3

Time in Existence N = 125	% of Centers
Less than 3 months	0.0
3-11 months	8.0
1-2 years	15.1
2-3 years	20.5
3-4 years	24.0
5 or more years	32.0

Thus, while not "established" in the sense of being a conventional academic department or student services agency, most seem to have survived beyond the year or two life span that is often the fate of many educational reforms or experiments.

However, from length of time in existence one can't necessarily assume the presence of paid, full time , non-student staff to conduct the programs which the Centers offer. Twenty percent (20%) of the centers responding reported having no paid staff, with over fifty percent (54.2%) having none or 1-2. When viewed in conjunction with the fact that more than three-fourths of the Centers reported using volunteers, these figures imply a heavy reliance on such staff. TABLES 4 and 5 present the findings from the Survey regarding the Number of Paid Staff and the Number of Volunteers with which women's center operate.

TABLE 4

Number of Paid Staff n = 131	% Center
None	20.6
1-2	33.6
3-5	25.2
6-10	15.3
More than 10	1.5
Missing	3.8

TABLE 5

Number of Volunteer Staff n = 131	% Center
None	19.1
1-2	14.5
3-5	19.1
6-10	14.5
More than 10	27.5
Missing	5.3

While staff may not be paid by Centers for their time, the possibility of academic credit as an exchange for time worked was recognized and accordingly included in the Survey. The findings showed a similarly high percentage, over 70%, reporting that only 1-2 or none of their staff received

credit for their work. The full range of responses on that question is reported in TABLE 6 below.

TABLE 6

Number of Staff Receiving Credit for their Center Work

	% Center
None	55.7
1-2	16.8
3-5	9.2
6-10	3.8
More than 10	6.1
Missing	8.4

Table 7 reports the responses of Centers on the issue of full versus part time staff workers. Approximately half of the Centers indicated they have no full time staff and the percentage of those reporting very few or none approached 70%. Less than 10% of the Centers noted that all of their workers were paid. Additionally, as represented in TABLE 7, over half of the Centers are staffed fully or mostly by students.

TABLE 7

Staff Workers n = 131	% Centers	
	Full Time	Students
All	8.4	25.2
Most	10.7	27.5
Some	5.3	18.3
Very Few	19.1	8.4
None	49.6	14.5
Missing	6.9	6.1

The data presented thus far indicates that not only did over 50% of the Centers have none or only 1-2 of their staff paid, but that staffs are comprised of a high percentage of volunteers, who are students, receiving no credit for their center work. There are particular problems which women's centers face when students comprise all or most of the staff. Students graduate, have other primary commitments and changing schedules and unless there is systematic attention to the sharing of skills and information, a Center may find itself starting anew each year or each semester.

The problem of attrition, or lack of continuity of staff can be seen in the responses (TABLE 8) to the question of percentage of staff who have worked over one year.

TABLE 8

Percentage of Staff Who Have Worked Over One Year
n = 131

	% Centers
All	10.7
Most	16.0
Some	23.7
Very Few	26.7
None	9.9
N/A - Center Hasn't Existed 1 Full Year	7.6
Missing	5.3

The range and type of programs offered by women's centers provides another way of viewing their efforts at meeting educational needs. Most centers provide direct services to supplant existing biased services or to meet needs where services are non-existent as well as advocating for other changes within the institution. Over two-thirds of the Centers have a library, drop-in center,

medical, legal, educational and/or welfare referral information as well as short term counseling. Additionally, over half of the Centers responding indicated that they sponsor support groups, workshops, career counseling, re-entry or entry programs for non-traditionsl women students, a speakers service and a newsletter. TABLE 9 presents the percentage of Centers having the programs noted. This was not seen by the researchers and should not be viewed as an exhaustive list of programs which are offered by women's centers. However, it does provide a view of the range of their efforts and some indication of the needs they try and address. The magnitude of these efforts takes on striking proportions when one recalls the staffing patterns noted previously.

TABLE 9

Programs Offered by Centers	% Centers Having Program	Number Responding
Library	80.1	129
Drop In Center	78.6	129
Medical, Legal,Educational &/or Welfare Referrals	71.6	128
Short Term Counseling	67.7	129
Assertiveness Training	62.3	129
Support Groups (C.R. Groups)	60.6	129
Credit or Non Credit Workshops	59.1	129
Career Counseling or Workshops	57.6	129
Re-Entry or Support Programs for Non-Traditional Women Students	57.6	129
Speakers' Service	56.1	128
Newsletter	52.9	129
Affirmative Action/Discrimination Advocacy	30.4	128
Academic Courses	24.8	129
Rape Crisis Intervention	21.0	128
Arts Program	15.2	129
Long Term Counseling or Workshops	12.0	129

An additional dimension on which women's centers were asked to describe themselves in responding to the Survey was that of degree and type of administrative support received. This was defined on the questionaire as "providing helpful information, advocating for your programs in meetings where you are present and in those in which you're not, recognizing (grudgingly or generously) the worth of the programs you have or wish to create or making budget decisions in your favor". The responses to the question "Do you get support from administrators on your campus who have program and budget decision making authority or influence?" indicated that while 77% felt they receive support from between 1 to 5 or more administrators, approximately 19% either got no administrative support or got it from administrators not in such positions. A more detailed portrayl of the the responses follows in TABLE 10.

TABLE 10
Administrative Support

n =131

		% of Centers
Yes	from 1-2	40.5
Yes	from 3-5	19.8
Yes	from more than 5	16.8
No	Those administrators from who we get support are not in such positions	8.4
No	We get no administrative support	9.9
Missing		4.6

Perspectives of Centers' on what forms that support takes are displayed on TABLE 11. Approximately three-fourths reported receiving recognition of the worth of their programs, slightly over half say they are provided with helpful information and advocacy for their programs and about 40% cited administrators making budget decisions in their favor. Thus, while, most centers identified themselves as receiving administrative support, most often that takes the form of "recognition of the worth of programs offered".

TABLE 11
Types of Administrative Support
n = 120

	% of Centers
Helpful Information	58.2
Advocacy for Programs	55.6
Recognition of worth of programs	74.0
Making budget decisions in your favor	41.6
N/A - we get no support	8.3

A response option of "OTHER" to the question regarding type of administrative support received elicited additional comments such as "publicity of center programs", "active participation and attendence at programs", "new ideas", "advocacy in public with others", and"personal influence in non-campus feminist circles". However, some comments offered were less positive. As a reflection of the institutional climate, one center reported there being only two women faculty on campus and no women in the administration. Other centers noted "fighting for support", "minimal support", and "getting juggled as we aren't seen as a priority or a necessity" as ways they would characterize the administrative response to their efforts.

It is interesting to compare the responses of Centers to the questions of receiving support from program and budgetary decision makers on their campus (particularly, that 77% felt they receive support from 1 to 5 or more such administrators and that slightly over 40% felt that such support took the form of making budget decisions in their favor) to the answers of centers regarding what their actual budget was from campus sources. TABLE 12 outlines the reported budget allotments of responding Centers. In light of the responses noted above regarding degree and type of administrative support, that two-thirds of the Centers reported having budgets from campus sources of less than $10,000 is hardly the type or level of support one would expect as institutional recognition of the worth of programs. It can only pique one's consternation

further to recall the data presented regarding the range of programs offered in relation to the budgets and level of staffing with which centers struggle.

TABLE 12
Women's Centers Budgets
n = 120

	Budget From On-Campus Sources
$0	13.3%
Less than $1,000	17.4%
$1,000 - $5,000	31.6%
$5,001 - $10,000	11.7%
$10,001 - $20,000	5.8%
$20,001 - $50,000	14.2%
$50,001 - $75,000	4.2%
Over $75,000	.88%
Missing	9.2%

Organizational Concerns and Institutional Constraints

What emerges is a picture of women's centers as organizations whose advantageous cross-departmental position is less able to be utilized and their potential realized because of patterns of problematic internal organizational response to their efforts.

Considering some of their answers to questions regarding organizational issues may help identify concerns and extend our view of these Centers. In addition to the previously noted transiency and staffing patterns, the preponderence of Centers described their choice of organizational structure as "loosely structured", or "Non-hierarchical" or " a blend of hierarchical and non-hierarchical" and their decision making process as "consensual" or "shared". Understandable and appropriate choices from a feminist ideological perspective but difficult to manage given the attrition rate and less than full time, usually unpaid staff which Centers tend to have. Both dimensions of organizational design and

functioning are critical to the effectiveness of any organization.

Further, while the cross-departmental position previously noted is advantageous in terms of comprehensiveness of responses possible to educational needs, that same situation can also be characterized as "marginal", with all of the difficulties associated with the term and position.

Handling marginality, a non-traditional organizational structure and a complex and time consuming style of decision making would be a struggle for an organization with a budget and staff consistent with its programming efforts. The constraints of inadequate fiscal resources and the staffing patterns previously noted can only serve to complicate these circumstances and choices for Centers.

Other, related organizational concerns which were cited by more than 30% of those Centers responding are listed in TABLE 13.

TABLE 13
Organizational Issues
n = 126

Issues that have been difficult for the Center/group	
Tendency to overcommit time and energy or to feel guilty for not being able to do that	58.8%
What the goals of the Center should be	57.9%
Decision Making Processes and responsibilities	45.2%
Structure of the Center	41.3%
How to coordinate and divide the work	38.1%
Commitment to the center as a whole vs. commitment to a single program	34.9%
Diversity or the lack of it on the staff	34.1%
Tension between the needs of staff, program administration needs and needs of participants	34.1%
Structure vs. Structurelessness	33.4%

Interacting with and related to organizational concerns/issues are institutional considerations which may be experienced or seen as constraints. In any higher education institution relating to, dealing

with and securing resources from campus administrators is a complex and demanding task for the liaison or head of a department. Even when some degree of congruence in goals, values etc. can be assumed or determined. Since women's centers are contending with the array of organizational concerns noted, conducting programs which challenge institutional policy and practices as well as struggling with the additional pressure of difficult dealings with administrators, this already complex process of negotiating for institutional resources takes on an even more difficult cast.

Findings from the National Needs Survey suggest that the low budgets allocated to Centers, despite perceived support and "recognition of the worth of programs" may be correlated with particular issues in dealing with administrators In fact, over half the Centers responding cited differences in values and goals as related to poor working relationships with administrators. These and other sources of problems Centers noted are displayed in TABLE 14.

TABLE 14
Sources of Problems with Administrators
n = 131

	% Centers
Difference in values	58.8
Difference in politics	46.6
Difference in goals	53.4
They feel threatened	42.0
They're alot older	8.4
We can't prove that we can do what we say	4.6
They have all the power	34.4
They don't listen	22.9
We feel threatened	6.1

TABLE 14 (con't)
Sources of Problems with Administrators
n = 131

	% of Centers
They say the campus already has (for everybody) the services we want to create for women	28.2
They don't understand what we want to do	26.7
We don't respect them	8.4
We're defensive	22.1
They are all straight males	24.4
Missing	5.3

Nearly half of the centers noted that a difference in politics provoked difficulty. Forty-two percent regarded the administrators as threatened by women's centers. Age differences and no respect for administrators were a problem for less than 10% and only 6% indicated that they felt threatened by administrators. Additionally, some centers noted a source of their difficulties as "not being taken seriously". "They don't recognize us, or see the need". Another problem was a lack of women in the administration of various institutions. Even in the rare instances ofwomen administrators, problems were still cited, "Our main spokesperson is a token women who is overly cautious about offending her male colleagues".

When insufficient fiscal and other substantive administrative support and difficulties in dealing with administrators occur in conjunction with the problematic internal organizational issues cited, a lessened effectiveness would be predicted for most organizations

The task of ensuring the effectiveness of organizations with the unique potential to respond to needs and issues regarding educational equity which is the position of campus based women's centers remains . At this point we know more about their common characteristics, their organization concerns and choices and the marginal (though potentially advantageous) position and funding levels from which they work to address educational needs.

The training program designed and conducted by the WEEA Project at Everywoman's Center, University of Massachusetts/Amherst was one response developed to address the problems and needs which Centers confront that lessen their effectiveness. Further efforts which will take into account the complexity and interconnedtedness of the organizational and institutional constraints which campus based women's centers face are in order,and in fact overdue,if the educational needs of women and issues of equity on campuses are to be addressed in a responsible way. The data generated in the National Needs Survey is one set of information which was previously unavailable to those working with this population and which should now be used to inform our work.